

INTRODUCTION TO TALLINN & ESTONIA

Brought to you by the 2009-10 Tallinn Fulbrighters

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Polly

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CONDUCTING A FULBRIGHT IN TALLINN, ESTONIA

WE'VE COLLECTED A NUMBER OF SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AFTER OUR 12, 9, OR 6-MONTH TENURES AND HOPE THEY WILL BE HELPFUL FOR YOU AS YOU PLAN, ARRIVE, AND THRIVE IN ESTONIA.

ERIC, CAMERON, AND CHELSEA WILL SHARE SOME OF THE STORIES AND ANECDOTES BEHIND THESE SUGGESTIONS, BUT DON'T HESITATE TO CONTACT US WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR TO LEARN MORE!

CHECKLIST: TO DOS BEFORE LEAVING HOME
BUILD CONTACTS. SET EXPECTATIONS WITH YOUR HOST
BANKING. TALK TO YOUR BANK
PACKING. BRING IMPORTANT PAPERS WITH YOU

GETTING AROUND AND TRAVEL

ARRIVAL AND FLIGHTS. AVOID FEES AND STRESS
TALLINN ORIENTATION. ROAD NAMES DESCRIBE THEIR
ENDPOINTS

VACATION TIME. GET OUT AND SEE THE COUNTRY

BASICS OF LIVING IN TALLINN

RENTING AN APARTMENT. WAIT UNTIL YOU ARRIVE
OBTAINING YOUR RESIDENCY PERMIT. PREPARE TO USE
PATIENCE

SHOPPING AND FOOD. WHERE AND WHAT TO BUY
WEATHER AND SAFETY. BEWARE THE ICICLES
TRANSPORT. BUSES, TRAMS, AND TAXIS
INTERNET. IT'S EVERYWHERE

CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND TIPS

COMMUNICATING. IT'S OK IF YOU DON'T HEAR "THANK
YOU"

WORKING. EXPECT THINGS TO WORK A BIT DIFFERENTLY
SOCIAL AND INVITATIONS. MAKE FRIENDS BEFORE WINTER

CHECKLIST: YOUR TO-DO LIST BEFORE LEAVING HOME

▪ **BUILD CONTACTS.** CONTACT YOUR HOST INSTITUTION AGAIN AND AGAIN.

▪ **BANKING.** SET UP YOUR AMERICAN BANK ACCOUNTS FOR INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER.

▪ **PACKING.** IMPORTANT PAPERWORK, DIPLOMATIC POUCH, WARM CLOTHES.

- Set expectations with your host institution. It will benefit both of you.
 - For scholars: confirm what courses you are teaching, that the class has been advertised, and the level of your students
 - Ask specific questions, reevaluate your definitions of:
 - Deadlines
 - Distance-learning
 - Office space
 - Credit hour, length of instruction/teaching
 - Recitations and lecture lengths
 - Final exams and grading (e.g., pass/fail)
 - Assignments (e.g., not common to require assignment completion during the semester)
 - Your relationship with your host institution can make or break your experience.
- Start to build contacts in Estonia before you arrive. Meet or hold phone calls with Americans familiar with Estonia or Estonian-Americans in your field to learn as much as you can before arrival. Estonians might expect you to know them!
- Students are very well educated at the high school level, but academic culture at University level is not as rigorous as in top Universities in U.S.













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- Inform your home bank that you're going abroad and make a personal connection with a banker.
 - Have back-up means for taking out money.
 - ATMs in Estonia return your card *after* the transaction. It's easy to walk away without it!
 - Credit cards and banks may have high fraud alerts and could cancel transactions. Inform them of your travel plans.
 - Wire transferring can be problematic. Learn your bank's policies before you leave.
 - Co-signers based in the U.S. and Paypal could help to manage money transfers.
 - International withdrawal and ATM fees differ. Learn your bank's policies.
- Recommendations once in Estonia between two major banks: Swedbank and SEB
 - Swedbank is our recommended bank:
 - Can keep money in different currencies and transfer when rate is best
 - Online banking is the norm and is very simple to use.
 - ATMs are widely available
 - SEB:
 - Does not offer bank accounts to American citizens without residency permits
 - ATMs are also widely available

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- Arrange important paperwork before leaving home.
 - Apostille *will be* needed if:
 - Bringing dependents or are a foreign-born national
 - Obtain an apostille from Secretary of State of the state from which the birth certificate issued
 - Will be expensive if done from Estonia!
 - Every state's policies are different
 - Insurance information and cards will be important for your residency permit.
- Use the diplomatic pouch for supplies.
 - May be helpful if you need to transport supplies
 - Be prepared to have the pouch searched (by State Dept.) and to be screened
 - Best used for supplies that will be used in Estonia and that you don't plan to bring back to States—there's no "returning" diplomatic pouch
- Bring photocopies of all important documents you are bringing in case of emergency (e.g., passport, credit cards).
- Bring whatever warm/winter clothes you have. Clothing and shoes are generally cheaper in U.S., except in second-hand stores.
 - If you care, having the "right clothing" matters
 - Bring with you, winter coats (probably cheaper in U.S. expect to spend around \$250 for a good coat in Estonia), winter boots, Long underwear
 - Summer stuff used only a bit—most of the summer, you will still need a light jacket (and bug spray)
 - Winter sports are popular; many layers will be necessary
- Books in English are not widely available in Estonia. You may want to gather reading materials and bring them with you.
- Paper and office supplies: Office supplies are generally different (no manila folders, clear plastic sleeves instead; 2 hole vs 3 hole punches). If there's something you rely on, bring it.

TRAVEL TIPS, GETTING AROUND, AND VACATION TIME

▪ ARRIVAL AND FLIGHTS. RESEARCH TO AVOID HIGH FEES AND STRESS.

▪ TALLINN ORIENTATION. ROAD NAMES DESCRIBE THEIR ENDPOINTS.

▪ VACATION TIME. GET OUT OF TOWN AND SEE THE COUNTRYSIDE.

▪ Airport into the city

- Baggage:
 - Overage fees may be high. Check into fees before buying airline tickets.
 - Be prepared to pay different prices for checked bags within Europe. European carriers have different weight limits and fees
 - May be most convenient to check bags all the way to your final destination
- Bus to/from airport is #2 and is easily accessible to the center of Tallinn
 - Wait at the stop furthest north coming out of the airport—bus at side of airport departure does not go into center of Tallinn. Be sure you're on the bus that goes directly downtown
 - To go to the airport, stop is outside of main shopping center, Viru Keskus and opposite the Tallink hotel
- There are flights to Tallinn from Stockholm, Copenhagen, Riga, Helsinki and London every day.
 - Discount airlines:
 - AirBaltic: will likely change planes in Riga
 - EasyJet: flights to London Stansted several times a week
- A general tip: worry about saving money later, not when you first arrive. When you first get to Estonia, just be prepared to spend going rates and look for less expensive options once you've settled in.
- [other flight tips?] Round trips to lock in rates vs. one - way, no baggage fees on ferries.
- I think it was ~600 eek to ship 20 kg to the USA.
- Around \$10-\$15 to take a cab into the center, perhaps a bit more if you are a large group.

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- The streets are named for where they end (e.g., Narva mnt. goes to city of Narva, Tartu mnt. in direction of Tartu)
- Most streets, buses, and trams branch out from Tallinn's Old Town
- Several key landmarks will be helpful in getting around
 - Habujaama=Viru keskus=central bus stop for buses along Narva mnt.
 - Estonia pst. is near Estonian Opera and Ballet houses
 - Church spires in old town are good reference points

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- Easy to travel by bus around Estonia and to the other Baltics.
 - Bus travel is more common in Estonia than in U.S.
 - Buses from Tallinn to Tartu have wifi and are comfortable
 - Bus trip to Riga is relatively short: 4.5 hours
- If you want to see Estonian countryside, rent a car.
 - But be prepared to spend on petrol
 - Akord is a good firm
 - Hertz and other international rental car agencies are also available including in Saaremaa and Tartu
 - Easy flight to Saaremaa via Estonian Air
- Traveling to Russia:
 - Helsinki to St. Petersburg on ferry possible without visa. Otherwise, need to plan to pay and wait for Russian visa.
- Traveling to Finland
 - Ferries to Helsinki runs multiple times a day and are affordable
 - Companies: Tallink.ee,
 - Consider doing a mid-winter (Feb/Mar) trip to somewhere southern (like the Estonians do).
 - Egypt, Turkey, and India are popular destinations
 - Travel within Europe (Schengen) is very easy and often affordable
 - Travel agencies offer good deals (including at last-minute)

BASICS OF LIVING IN TALLINN

▪ RENTING AN APARTMENT. LOOK BEFORE YOU ARRIVE, MAKE DECISION IN TALLINN.

▪ OBTAINING YOUR RESIDENCY PERMIT. BE PATIENT AND BRING AN ESTONIAN-SPEAKER.

▪ SHOPPING AND FOOD. WHAT YOU CAN AND CAN'T GET, AND WHERE TO FIND IT.

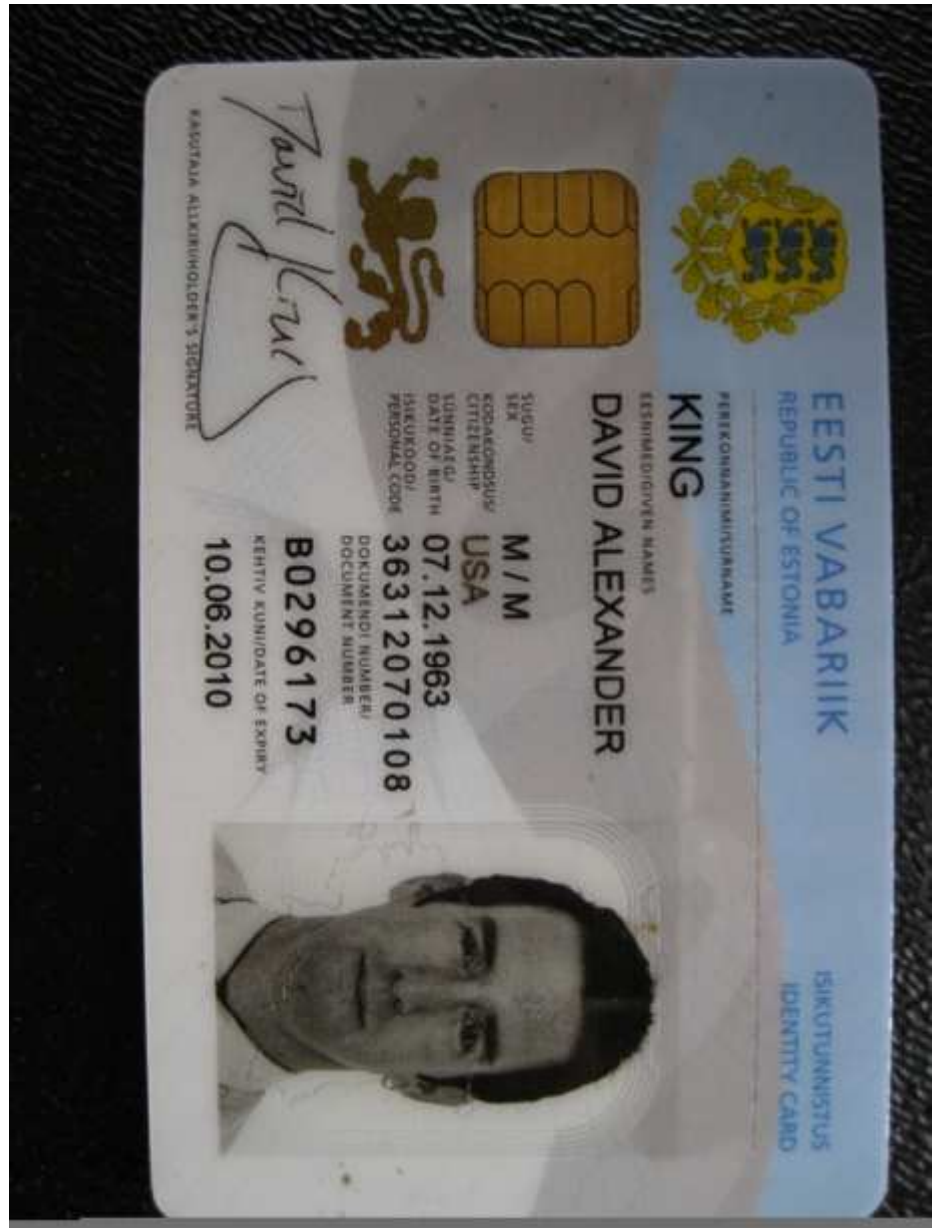
▪ WEATHER AND SAFETY. DRESS WARMLY AND WATCH WHERE YOU WALK.

▪ TRANSPORT. BUS PASSES, MAPS, ETC.

▪ PHONES AND INTERNET. SETTING UP INTERNET, WIFI, AND CELL PHONES.

- Our advice: find something short-term when you first arrive, then look around and decide.
 - Hostels and hotels are available for your first few days
- Most helpful website: City24.ee
- Housing bubble may have burst, but still many options available for relatively inexpensive rates (compared to cities in U.S.).
- Furnished apartments are widely available (but quality of “furnished” varies.)
- Neighborhoods to look at, in rank order:
 1. City Center and Old Town (Kesklinn, Vanalinn)
 - Centrally located and close to public transport and shopping
 2. Kadriorg
 - Great location near the park
 - A bit more residential than city center and will require use of public transport most days
 3. Kalamaja
 - Good for artists but a bit sketchy after dark
 - Very nice, old wooden homes
 4. Kristiine
- We don't recommend, for lack of convenience and safety, the neighborhoods of Lasnamäe, Mustamäe, Oismäe
- Realtors can be very helpful, but it may be best to bring an Estonian speaker with you on visits.
 - Be sure to ask about heating and electricity costs—they can vary widely
 - Most apartments have both clothing and dishwashers

ID and Bus Ticket



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- Start process for applying for permit immediately upon arrival.
 - Expect process to take up to three months.
- Exercise patience throughout application process.
 - Expect to receive limited support from your host institutions and the Embassy. It's helpful to notify them of progress (or lack thereof), however.
 - Plan on going to the permit office several times
 - Bring someone who speaks Estonian
 - Expect to hear different procedures from different individuals
 - You may have to use your "pushy Americanness" and push the process forward yourself
- Papers needed for each applicant differ:
 - Insurance card is often not enough, likely to need full proof of Insurance with letter from Fulbright
 - Fellows: ask Rachel for this letter. She's written it before.
 - Plan to bring documents and detailed letters of invitation from host
 - Letters for Fellows need to state your course of study can be completed in Estonian or English/that you have sufficient language skills to carry out your work
 - Bank account statements are not necessary, but could be good for dependents
 - If dependant is over age of 18, going to be very problematic.
 - Permits for dependants are generally difficult processes.
 - Documents must prove that you have been given sufficient funds to live in Estonia and will not need Estonian governmental support

Showalter's experience

Eric (on Fulbright)

Polly (spouse)

Lucas (17 years old)

Nathan (turned 19)

It will take several trips

NOBODY knows exactly how this works

Take someone to translate

Be an "American," TUT was helping me apply for a teaching permit that would not have included my family

The Showalters had a complicated time:

- It took a total of 10 trips to get everything (2.5 trips per person)
- Eric easiest to Nathan hardest
- General observations, prove:
 - You are who you say you are
 - Passport, apostilled birth certificates and marriage licenses
 - You won't burden the Estonian system
 - Proof of insurance, proof of income from Fulbright and perhaps other sources, maybe show your return ticket
 - Someone wants you to be in Estonia
 - Letter from host institution
 - Alternate: Lots of cash in the bank

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- Central shopping malls: Viru Keskus, Solaris, Foorum
- Store hours:
 - Standard store hours are 9am to 9pm-21/22/23
 - 24-hour stores also available
 - Buying alcohol only possible until 10pm
- Prescriptions and doctors are very affordable. Consider saving your dentistry and doctors visits for Estonia.
- Camping equipment generally more expensive in Estonia.
- Books in English are not widely available.
 - There's an "underground" book trade (Embassy basement has books left from past visitors).
 - Some English-language books (mostly fiction) are available in bookstore in Viru Keskus
- Buy printer/scanner in Estonia. Using them at workplaces or Universities can be problematic.
 - Euronics or Klick for around \$50-\$70

Stores to visit:

More places to get stuff

- IDEal (Macintosh); Jysk near airport for cheap towels, sheets, blankets, pillows; Abakhan fabric for towels by the kg and maybe fleece by the yard for blankets?; Humana for second hand clothing, end of month everything gets cheaper and cheaper;

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- Eating Out:

- (from Alexis)
- Our recommendations:
 - Shop at markets for seasonal products (Keskturg, Balti Jaam)
 - NOP in Kadriorg
 - F-Hoone in Kalamaja (new favorite)
 - Must Puudel in Vanalinn (new favorite)
 - Hell Hunt for food and drinks
 - Vapiano's for pizza and pasta
 - 2nd floor of Solaris buffet style (lots of food cheap)

- Grocery shopping:

- (from Alexis)
- Rimi, Selver, Maxima are the least expensive options
- Viru Keskus (Kaubamaja) food store and Solaris food store have selections of higher-end products

- Eesti Toit (Estonian Food):

- We recommend trying: Hapukoor, Kohupiim, Must leib
- Pork is the most common meat
- It's possible to find vegetarian or vegan options, but not widely available in restaurants.

Market shopping

Might take you a while to get used to the idea, but it is where a lot of locals shop

The clerks tend to be Russian speakers

Freshest, cheapest meat and produce

NOT the freshest or even the cheapest milk and other canned goods

Prices are generally clearly marked on groceries

- Baltijaam (train station) Market
 - Groceries, second hand clothing, “antiques,” tools, tombstones, crackers, cookies
- Keskturg (Central Market) near autobussi jaam (bus station)
 - Meat, fish, produce, cheese, bread, clothes, cloth, yarn

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- In winter:
 - Temperatures can be as low as -25C. Dress accordingly. Even though it's cold, buses, houses, and places of work are very well heated.
 - Icicles are everywhere in winter and are a real concern.
 - Don't walk under edges of buildings, walk in center of street when possible
 - If driving, don't park under icicle zone (buildings where they're visible)
 - A sunlamp may be helpful during the dark months, specifically November, December, and January. Regular exercise will also help during the dark months.
 - Be cautious about speaking English loudly to draw attention. With the tourists gone, you become more noticeable and perhaps a target.
- In summer:
 - There are many mosquitoes and other bugs in summer
 - Estonian custom is to spend a lot of time in countryside as soon as summer arrives. Go if you can!
 - Tallinn becomes a tourist town and full of cruise-ship travelers. Beware of pick pockets.
 - Men should wear speedos (short shorts) in public pools
- In general:
 - Estonians have a different conception of fire safety and accessibility.
 - Watch where you walk—sidewalks aren't straight or flat. Drainage and cellar door locks can be found in sidewalks
 - Extra locks on doors and deadbolts are common.
 - Be careful with purses and jackets when out at bars, etc. The most likely place to have your items stolen are off the back of a chair in bars.
 - Generally, it's very safe to walk around town even though it's quiet and maybe dark. Especially in summer, people are enjoying the outdoors late and are around.

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- Buses and public transport:
 - Bus and tram passes:
 - Site with current prices, sometimes cheaper to buy one/two hour tickets.
 - If going to be riding multiple times a day, you can use your ID card and lease to get cheaper bus passes. 10/30/90 day passes available.
 - Discount tickets are available for students, same to one hour ticket as a one-use ticket.
 - Bus tickets:
 - Buy tickets at R kiosks.
 - You must punch tickets (if don't have a pass) at machine inside the second doors onto bus or tram. They do check tickets on buses! Stamp to avoid fines.
 - Four bus/tram stops can have same name, but will be in different but nearby locations. Check the signs for bus numbers, directions, and times of arrival.
- Taxis:
 - Always call for cabs around the city—getting them on the street is significantly more expensive.
 - For convenience, picking up a taxi at airport or ferry may be slightly more expensive, but worthwhile.
 - Taxi companies we like: Reval Takso, Tallink, VikingTaxi
 - Ask prices before getting into cabs, if you aren't familiar with the company. Always ask for a receipt.
 - Bus to/from airport is #2 and is easily accessible to the center of Tallinn.
 - Wait at the stop furthest north coming out of the airport—bus at side of airport departure does not go into center of Tallinn. Be sure you're on the bus that goes directly downtown.
 - From city center to airport, pick up is outside of main shopping center, Viru Keskus and opposite the Tallink hotel.

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- Internet—it's everywhere!
 - WiFi is widely available in cafes, restaurants, common areas like airport.
 - Be password-protective on free wifi, be cautious about banking, etc.
 - Very normal to use public wifi
 - In the house:
 - Starman and Elion are the most common providers
 - Best to get an annual subscription and avoid purchasing equipment.
 - Mobile access to Internet is inexpensive and easily purchased from a telecomm carrier.
 - Professionally, almost everyone uses Skype and keeps it up on their computers all day.
- Mobile Phones:
 - Most common means for communicating. Text messages are more common than phone calls (SMS messages cost less).
 - It's possible to unlock phones that take SIM cards. If you need to buy a new phone, the lowest level phones at EMT run around \$50.
 - Pay as you go Plans:
 - EMT's Sempel is inexpensive and good in Estonia. Internationally problematic.
 - Tele2's Smart is more flexible abroad
 - May be worthwhile to invest in Skype Out and a U.S. phone number via Skype for communication back to the States.

CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND TIPS

▪ COMMUNICATING IN ESTONIA. OVERCOME THE DISTANCE.

▪ WORKING IN ESTONIA. EXPECT THINGS TO BE A BIT DIFFERENT.

▪ SOCIAL LIFE AND INVITATIONS. SAY “YES” AND ENGAGE.

- Introversion is more common than extroversion.
 - When first meeting people, be cautious and conscious that people, generally, are quieter and not initially gregarious. They may seem distant or rude but it simply takes time for people to “warm up”.
 - At some point, things do “open up” and start to come easier. Be proactive and engage.
- English is widely spoken in Tallinn, but your attempts to speak Estonian will be appreciated.
 - “He” and “she” is problematic for Estonians speaking English. (In Estonian there is no difference). Don’t be offended!
 - Estonians are more likely and more willing (especially younger people) to speak English than Russian.
 - If using Estonian, be patient or write things down. There are not many foreign speakers of Estonian and many are not used to hearing the language spoken by non-native speakers.
- Don’t expect to be thanked in the usual ways or asked questions of a personal or professional nature.
 - *But* It doesn’t mean people are not interested or appreciative.
 - Lack of feedback doesn’t mean you’re not doing a good job.
- Plans are often made late and are undefined. Roll with it.
 - Plans may be made but are not communicated (e.g., “secret planning”). Be flexible.
 - RSVPs and parties:
 - Guests may arrive early, are always on time
 - Don’t expect to receive RSVPs in the same way
- Facebook and Skype are great for keeping in touch inside and outside of Estonia.
- Estonians see themselves as more Scandinavian than Baltic. The Estonian language is more similar to Finnish (Finno-Ugric language group) than it is to Latvian or Lithuanian.
- Be somewhat image-conscious, but there’s no need to dress with formality. Jeans and jackets are common in business settings but people, women especially, do think about how they present themselves.

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- Pace of life is different—often slower—than in U.S. People work very hard, but start later in the day and take time off in summer, etc.
- Estonians are just as hard on themselves as they seem to us. Culture is highly self-critical and failure is not valued.
- There are few male/female divides professionally. Many young women are very accomplished and have gained great responsibility.
- There is a divide, especially in temperament, between Estonians and the Russian-speaking minority. Russian-speakers can seem louder, more boisterous, and prefer to speak in Russian.
- Working relationships in Universities and professional environments are not necessarily collaborative.
 - You may find resistance to sharing of work and responsibility among other instructors and professionals.
 - Be mindful that within an industry or field, most people will know everyone but do not necessarily work together regularly.
- Our advice: work to build trust among colleagues and communicate your ability to help rather than burden, to be an asset rather than to impede.

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- Say “yes” to as many invitations as you can.
 - Always take shoes off (don’t even ask!) when entering the home.
 - Be aware that country-houses vary significantly in accommodation, but are lovely to spend time at in summer
 - If invited to a sauna party, bring a swimsuit but be aware that naked sauna can be
 - Offer invitations to get invitations.
 - Have parties and invite everyone you know.
 - A series of dinner parties really works, but don’t necessarily expect a return invitation.
 - Make friends before winter, if possible.
 - When you meet people, be proactive and commit to making friends
 - Don’t restrict your friend groups to Estonian or expat
 - Keeping busy will help through the long winter
 - Don’t be afraid to talk to people in bars or cafes, even though it’s not common to meet people
- Go to cultural events and join groups.
 - Volunteer teaching or other volunteerism can help you build a community. Help out at Embassy events.
 - Foreigners in Estonia, International Womens groups, can be helpful.
 - Student organizations like Erasmus Students Network are good ways to meet people.
 - If people have spent time abroad, they may be much more willing to engage with you as a foreigner.
- Cross-country skiing in winter is great, but dress accordingly.
 - Pirita and Nomme are the best places in Tallinn to ski.
- Be aware of local holidays.
 - In summer and for Jaanipäev, Estonians go to their country houses. Stores may be closed.
 - Celebrate Independence day in February. Attend the flag-raising and parade.

**OUR GENERAL ADVICE:
DO THE BEST YOU CAN AND EXPECT CHANGES.
BE PATIENT AND ROLL WITH WHAT COMES!**

Contact us with any questions or to share your experiences! Find us on Facebook, Skype or Email.

2009-10 Fulbrighters

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GOOD LUCK AND ENJOY!